

MEET *your* MAKER

Canadian luthier **RAYMOND SCHRYER** was able to offer some customised innovations when he made a cello for **RAPHAEL WEINROTH-BROWNE**

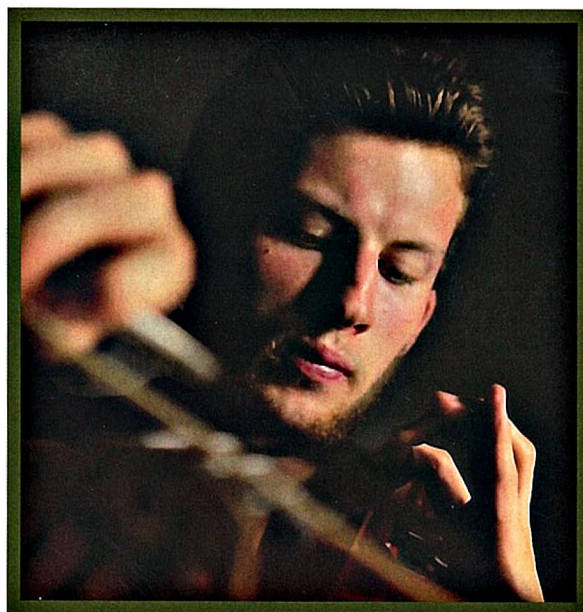
RAPHAEL WEINROTH-BROWNE

I am interested in modern cellos for their clarity, volume and brightness, not to mention their affordability. The performance of a great modern instrument is very consistent. My teacher recommended some makers to me during the third year of my bachelor's degree, as it was clear that my instrument could not produce the range I needed. My search did not last long, since a fellow cellist at the University of Ottawa had recently purchased a Schryer cello. I tried it and immediately loved the sound and ease with which I could play. I remember the three- and four-note chords of the Sarabande of Bach's Sixth Cello Suite were so easy: everything was in tune and the voices clear.

I first spoke to Ray on the phone. He explained his design for the cello and specific features he planned to use, such as a wooden tailpiece without fine tuners and a carbon-fibre rod to stabilise the neck, as well as a tight endpin that improves sound transfer. I told him I wanted an instrument with volume, a powerful low end and a fast response. These factors are critical to performing unaccompanied cello music as well as concertos, but they are also essential to the non-classical music that I perform and record.

RAY TRAVELLED WITH THE CELLO to my home in Ottawa in May 2012. He had periodically sent me updates and pictures as he was building it, so I had seen the unvarnished wood and the shape of the body. But the colour, overall design and appearance were a mystery until I received it. The finish is beautiful. Sometimes it appears dark red or almost brown, and under the spotlight it is a flaming orange–yellow. I remember being very excited when I began playing it for the first time. It was a special experience playing a cello that no one else had ever used before. I tried a number of pieces – Bach Suites, Ligeti and Kodály solo sonatas and one of my own pieces that requires scordatura. Everything sounded better than before and felt easier: I didn't feel the need to press at all. I was able to relax, save my energy and focus on the music. I saw a world of possibilities opening up.

The instrument is easy to tune and retune because of the machine-head tuning pegs, which allow me to write



▲ 'I wanted an instrument with volume, a powerful low end and a fast response': Raphael Weinroth-Browne

pieces in unusual tunings and switch in the middle of a concert. It has a fairly low action, without compromising volume, and a good feel in the left hand. Initially, the sound of the C and G strings was huge and the D and A strings were less present, but after a month the two higher strings became louder and brighter. I noticed a clarity of intonation and sound from the beginning, which is great for recording, and I used the cello for numerous studio sessions less than a month after purchasing it.

For any committed player an instrument is a kind of life-partner with which we spend innumerable hours and through which we experience both pleasure and pain. In the first phase of my relationship with this instrument, I was aware that this was a reliable cello. I could step on stage and be confident that it would be there for me. Now, however, I feel like this cello and I are so closely linked that sometimes in a performance I forget myself or I forget that I am actually playing an instrument. The intimacy with the cello becomes a kind of oneness intensified over the course of time.